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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a study of the publication practices of professional journals in education and psychology. The data are based on responses of 98 editors who completed and returned questionnaires that described their activities in 1978. The data are arranged according to the following topics: (1) why people write, (2) breaking into print, (3) selecting a topic, (4) types of journals, (5) selecting prospective journals, (6) use of query letters, (7) article acceptance rates, (8) comparison of journals with low and high acceptance rates, (9) comparison of research and other types of journals, (10) cost to authors/payment for articles, (11) time from submission to acceptance or rejection, (12) time from acceptance to publication, (13) style manual use, (14) refereed journals compared to nonrefereed journals, (15) number of articles that journals publish each year, and (16) length of articles. (HOD)

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Factors Involved in the Preparation and Submission of Manuscripts to Professional Journals

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Factors Involved in the Preparation and Submission of Manuscripts to Professional Journals

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Those who wish to write and submit journal articles for publication find that they face a lengthy series of questions which must be answered before they can proceed. A number of these questions are examined in this paper. The findings of a study of the publication practices of professional journals in education and psychology are reported. The data reported is based upon responses of 98 editors who completed and returned questionnaires which described their activities in 1978.

The following topics are discussed in this paper.

- Why people write
- Breaking into print
- Selecting a topic
- Types of journals
- Selecting prospective journals
- Use of query letters
- Article acceptance rates
- Comparison of journals with low and high acceptance rates
- Comparison of research and other types of journals
- Cost to authors/payment for articles
- Time from submission to acceptance or rejection
- Time from acceptance to publication

- Style manual use
- Refereed journals compared to non-refereed journals
- Number of articles journals publish each year
- Length of articles

Why People Write

The urge to write is a natural product of a scholar's pursuit of knowledge and the practitioners knowhow. Van Till (1968, p. 3) suggests that professionals write:

to communicate

for their own enjoyment

because they feel compelled to write

to achieve professional recognition

to earn money

to gain rewards through tenure, promotion, and pay raises

because of publish-or-perish policies

Informal review of the writing of members of the professional community suggests that the factor or combination of factors which motivate a person changes as their employment situation and age changes. It is likely that the need to continue one's employment is the basic motivating force behind the writing of many young non-tenured college and university faculty members. The factors which motivate senior faculty members to write are usually much different than those that motivate their younger colleagues. Retired Professionals who continue to write are probably responding to yet another set of motivational factors.

The writing and submission of articles to professional journals is one of the many types of professional writing. Authors should consider all available types of publications when they are developing an idea. The types of professional publications which are usually considered include -

- articles for professional journals
- book reviews
- newspaper and magazine columns
- grant proposals and technical reports
- chapters in books
- anthologies and books of reading
- textbooks
- tradebooks
- monographs
- specialized technical and reference books

Breaking Into Print

The quickest way to break into print is to write and submit an article to the editor of your hometown newspaper. Such an article should describe a topic or success story which is of local interest and value. This type of writing results in the reinforcement that comes from seeing one's name and work in print. It also eliminates the usual delays which often exist between the date when an article is submitted and a rejection or acceptance letter is received. Occasional feature articles may lead to an invitation to write a column for the local newspaper. This level of involvement can grow into columns in regional papers and those which are syndicated.

Many young members of the professional community break into print by writing articles for local and state level parent and professional association newsletters. These provide both experience and visability which can be expanded to include articles published in national level professional journals.

Articles related to one's master's theses or doctoral dissertation are often used as a starting point by college and university and faculty members. Van Till suggests that articles based on one's dissertation should be

1. written as soon as the degree is completed.
2. rewritten for the intended audience.
3. read by a friend, spouse or neighbor who knows nothing about the topic to be sure that it is understandable.

The first writing done by many members of the academic community is in the form of completing and submitting applications for federal and foundation funded grants. These activities provide valuable experience in written expression and often lead to the generation of data and experiences that can serve as the basis for articles that can be submitted to professional journals.

These writing activities are often followed by the writing of chapters for textbooks and yearbooks. Major scholarly efforts in the form of writing textbooks, specialized books and tradebooks often follow. The politics of the writer's place of employment tend to dictate the point in one's career when a major scholarly effort may be undertaken. Those who work on college and university campuses where the writing and publication of journal articles is regarded as pre-requisite to promotion, tenure and

merit pay often find that they must delay participation in major scholarly involvement until their tenure has been secured. Only then are they able to commit the amount of time required to write a book.

Selecting A Topic

The selection of a topic is usually the easiest part of writing an article. Most evolve out of the writer's need to share an idea, comment on an issue, describe a practice or procedure, critique the writing of others or the need to report data from a research study.

Young writers usually find it advisable to base their articles upon real experiences or research. A large percentage of the articles which comment on issues are written by well established professionals whose articles have been solicited. Young writers who choose to break into print by writing critical critiques of the work of established authorities in their fields often find that it is possible to get their work accepted and published. They may be able to develop a sizeable list of publications, become promoted, tenured and receive regular merit pay raises without actually becoming involved in creation of new ideas themselves.

The topic must appeal to three audiences, the writer, editor and reader. It must be of sufficient interest to the writer to result in its completion. Topics which lie within the writer's area of academic preparation, specialization and experience are usually the most authoritative, convincing and likely to be completed. The topic must be of sufficient interest to the editor of the journal where it is submitted to be accepted and published. For many writers, the completion of the manuscript and its

acceptance and publication completes the process. The final test of an article lies with those who read, remember and quote it.

Types of Journals

Editors of 35 percent of the 98 journals studied indicated that they prefer articles which emphasize practical field oriented articles. One third state that they give preference to research articles in their article selection process while another twenty-five percent prefer articles that emphasize the discussion of current issues. Critical reviews were listed by 6.3 percent of the editors as being preferred (See Table I).

Selecting Prospective Journals

Two or three prospective journals where a planned article might be published should be examined before beginning to write. Check several issues of each journal to determine -

- the type of articles they are publishing.
- if the issues are topical or general in their coverage.
- the length of articles that are being published.
- the style that each uses.

Beginning writers tend to direct their journal writing efforts toward a few highly visable journals while overlooking dozens of regional and specialty journals which have much higher acceptance rates. The use of query letters is helpful in avoiding this problem.

Use of Query Letters

Query letters which describe a planned article may be forwarded to the editors of several journals at the same time before it is written.

These brief descriptions of the writer's plans and qualifications usually result in an immediate response while an unsolicited manuscript may be held for some time before the editor has time to read it.

Van Till suggests that the larger the journal the more important it is to use a query letter. He reports that many editors of research and specialized scholarly journals prefer to receive a completed manuscript at the time of their first contact.

Article Acceptance Rates

Twenty percent of the 31,077 articles submitted in 1978 to the journals studied were accepted for publication (See Table II). Unsolicited articles made up 96.5 percent of those submitted for publication and 82.5 percent of those that were published. The remaining 17.5 percent were written by invitation, by the journal's staff members or officers of the journal's sponsoring organizations.

Authors of unsolicited articles had 17 percent of their articles accepted for publication while their colleagues who were invited by journal editors to write articles were assured that their articles would be published before they wrote them.

Acceptance rates for unsolicited articles ranged from two tenths of one percent to nearly 100 percent. Twelve percent of the journals accepted less than 10 percent of the unsolicited articles they received. Thirty-eight percent accepted less than 20 percent of their unsolicited articles while 51 percent accepted one-fourth or fewer of their unsolicited articles. Editors of one-fourth of the journals report that they accepted more than 50 percent of the unsolicited articles they received.

Comparison of Journals with High and Low Acceptance Rates

The 98 journals were ranked in terms of the percentage of unsolicited articles each accepted. The 10 journals with the highest acceptance rates were compared with the 10 that had the lowest acceptance rates. Each group contained 10.2 percent of the journals studied.

Over one-third (36.80 percent) of the 31,077 articles submitted to the 98 journals were received by the 10 with the lowest acceptance rates while 2.5 percent of the total were received by the 10 with the highest acceptance rates. Unsolicited articles submitted to the 10 with the lowest acceptance rates were accepted for publication at a 3.5 percent rate while the 10 with the highest acceptance rates were accepted at 82 percent of the unsolicited articles they received.

The journal with the lowest acceptance rate received one-eighth of the total number of articles submitted for possible publication. It included eight of the 3,928 unsolicited articles it received among the 80 it published.

The journals with the lowest acceptance rates were highly visible publications with large circulations while those with the highest rates tended to be specialized publications, designed to serve specific disciplines and groups that are much smaller. Fifty percent of the articles appearing in the 10 journals with the lowest acceptance rates were written by invitation, journal staff members or officers of their sponsoring organizations.

Comparisons of Research and Other Types of Journals

Journals that give first priority to research articles were compared to "other" journals that give first priority to articles which emphasize

current issues, critical review, or the description of practices and procedures. The "other" category journals received 76 percent of the articles submitted for possible publication (See Table III). Eighteen percent of these were published. Research-oriented journals received 24 percent of the articles submitted. Twenty-six percent of the research articles were published. One-third the total number of articles published were research articles.

Ninety-six percent of the articles published in research-oriented journals were selected from unsolicited articles, while 76.4 percent of those published in "other" journals were selected from unsolicited articles. Solicited articles, and articles written by the journal's staff, or an officer of its sponsoring organization, made up 4 percent of those appearing in research-oriented journals and 23.6 percent of those appearing in other types of journals.

Cost to Authors/Payment for Articles

Ninety-three of the 98 editors report that they do not require authors to pay to have their articles published. The five journals which pass on a portion of the publications costs to their authors reported charges ranging from fifteen to fifty dollars per printed page with the average being thirty-five dollars. Three other editors report that they ask authors to pay the typesetting costs involved in producing tables.

Writers of professional articles rarely receive payment for their manuscripts. The exceptions that occur are in cases where a famous person is asked by an editor to write an article on a specific topic.

Time from Submission to Acceptance or Rejection

The average time between the receipt of an unsolicited article and notification of the author regarding its acceptance or rejection is three months. Ten percent of the editors notify authors within one month while six percent report an average response time of six months or more.

Time from Acceptance to Publication

The average time between acceptance and publication was six months. Fourteen percent of the editors reported an average delay of three months while ten percent averaged one year or more. The time between acceptance and publication was greatly affected in several cases where editors hold certain articles for inclusion in issues which focus on specific topics.

Style Manual Use

Fifty-one percent of the journals follow the American Psychological Association style manual while twenty-two percent follow the University of Chicago style manual (See Table IV). Six percent follow the Modern Language Association style manual. Eleven percent use their own style manual while eight percent do not follow a specific manual.

Refereed Journals Compared to Non-Refereed Journals

Eighty-three percent of the editors report that their journals are refereed (See Table V). The remaining editors report that the review of unsolicited articles is handled by their staff. Included among the journals which do not use a panel of referees in their article selection process were three of the ten most selective journals. The refereed

journals accepted 21.2 percent of the unsolicited articles they received while 8.9 percent of the articles submitted to journals that are not refereed were accepted.

Twenty-four percent of the articles published by non-refereed journals were written by invitation, staff members or officers of the sponsoring organization. Fourteen percent of the articles published in refereed journals were solicited articles.

Ninety-four percent of the research-oriented journals and 77 percent of the "other" journals use panels of referees as part of their article-screening and selection process. Editors of seven of the 10 most selective journals describe their publications as being refereed while nine of the 10 least selective journals were described as refereed.

Number of Articles Journals Publish During a Year

The number of articles that appeared in the journals during 1978 ranged from a high of 222 to a low of 12. Fewer than one hundred articles were published by 85 percent of the journals. Nearly one-half (49 percent) published fewer than fifty articles during the year. Those journals studied published an average of 63 articles during the year. At this rate, over 7,900 professional journals would be required if each of this nation's 500,000 college and university faculty members wrote and had one article published during each year.

The Length of Articles

Feature articles in The Phi Delta Kappan contain from 1500 to 4000 words. The research notes contain 1000 words or less while book reviews are usually 350 to 750 words. The The average article which

appears in Today's Education: NEA Journal contains from 1400 to 1800 words.

Summary

A wide range of factors must be considered in determining to write and during the actual preparation of the manuscript. Care must be exercised to insure that the topic length and style are compatible with the journals where the article may be submitted.

Those who submitted manuscripts during 1978 to the 98 journals studied faced a one in five chance of having their articles accepted. They were able to increase the likelihood that their articles would be published to nearly 100 percent by having a journal's editor invite them to write an article, by being a member of staff that edited the journal or by being an officer in the professional organization that sponsored the journal.

The chance that a manuscript would be published depended heavily upon the journal's editorial practices. The odds were obviously against the acceptance of an unsolicited manuscript by journals which devoted a large percentage of their space to solicited articles. Journals which devote each issue to a selected topic often find it necessary to reject quality manuscripts or hold them for a long period of time before publishing them.

Authors should examine the editorial practices of a journal before submitting a manuscript to it. Large numbers of rejections are assured when one-third of the manuscripts submitted to the 98 journals were received by six journals. When twenty-five percent of the journals studied

accept over fifty percent of the manuscripts they receive there is clearly an opportunity to publish carefully placed articles.

The low acceptance rate found among highly selective journals was created in part, by editorial policies which commit, on the average, one-half of their space to articles that are written by invitation, staff members and officers of their sponsoring organizations. The decision of authors to submit 36.8 percent of all manuscripts received by the 98 journals to the 10 most selective journals also contributed significantly to their low acceptance rates. The effect of these two factors upon manuscript acceptance rates suggests that the use of a journal's low acceptance rate as an indication of the value of a manuscript would be a questionable practice.

Research-oriented manuscripts, contrary to popular opinion, were more likely to be accepted for publication than other types of manuscripts. Those who feel the need to rapidly expand the number of articles they are having published, will find the preparation and submission of research manuscripts to be the most efficient route to this goal.

The practice of regarding refereed journals as being more selective than non-refereed journals was not supported by the findings of this study. Those who wish to make such distinctions must look to factors other than comparative selectivity rates to justify their statements.

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Table 1

Types of Journals*

Types	Percent
Current Issues	25.0
Critical Review	6.3
Research	33.7
Practice/General	35.0

*Classified according to the type of articles preferred by their editors.

Table II

Acceptance Rates of 98 Journals

Total number of articles received	31,077
Total number accepted	6,209
Percentage accepted	19,97%
Unsolicited articles received	29,993
Unsolicited articles accepted	5,123
Percentage unsolicited articles accepted	17.00%
Solicited article received	1.084
Solicited articles accepted	1,084
Percentage solicited articles accepted	100%

Table III

Comparison of the Publication Rates
For Research and Other Types of Journals

	Types of Journals	
	Research (%)	Other (%)
Articles received	24	76
Articles published	33	66
Articles published that were unsolicited	96	76.4
Articles published that were solicited	4	23.6

Summary:

1. One third of the articles were published by the research oriented journals (24% of the journals).
2. Nearly all of the articles which appeared in research journals were unsolicited.
3. Nearly one-fourth of the articles that appeared in other types of journals were unsolicited.

Table IV

Stayle Manual Use

Style	%
APA	46
Chicago	23
MLA	6
NEA	2
Own	11
None	8
Not reported	4
	100

Table V

Comparison of Acceptance Rates
for
Refereed and Non-Refereed Journals

	Refereed (83%)		Non-Refereed (17%)	
	#	%	#	%
Total articles received	20,784	-	10,288	-
Total articles accepted	5,036	24.2	1,173	11.4
Unsolicited articles received	19,976	-	10,011	-
Unsolicited articles accepted	4,227	21.2	896	8.9

Summary:

The acceptance rate for refereed journals was twice that for non-refereed journals.